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Anti-Zionism Is Anti-Semitism: A Response To Judith Butler

By Rebeca Siegel

A large part of the academic left aids and abets, promotes and develops Judeophobic discourse. Both in the spirit of dissent and reflection that any pluralistic society owes itself, especially from left-wing intellectuals, it is imperative that progressive academics who deplore racism or gender discrimination fight for our discursive spaces within the left by repudiating Judeophobia, the only locus where the left and the right consistently coincide.

Since the Al Aksa *intifada* there has been an upsurge of anti-Semitism, worrisome not only to Jews but to anyone who opposes any kind of racism. For progressive Jewish intellectuals working in American universities these anti-Semitic sentiments have significantly increased in the last two years and have taken their toll in our capacity to engage many members of the academic left. Many of us feel ostracized from this community, our inevitable quorum (and strategic discursive allies) if our research engages gender or ethnic studies, class and labor studies, popular culture, the cultural production of postcolonial countries or countries with a strong colonial legacy, cultural studies.

Especially if we traditionally identify with left-wing politics, we feel the more isolated if we do not align fully with the political agenda of the academic left which mostly adopts en bloc and as a given an “anti-Zionist” stance. Anti-Zionism, currently defined, not only criticizes Israel’s policies, but ultimately calls for the dismantling of the state and the configuration of a bi-national polity. Sadly, anti-Zionism has become the litmus test for progressives, an anti-Zionism that expresses itself as anti-Semitism. This worsening hostility not only within American academe, but other intellectual forums outside of the United States, has led me to engage a theoretical debate that many left wing scholars, Jewish and not, find indispensable.

Before responding to Judith Butler’s essay “The Charge of Anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and the Risks of Public Critique” (Kushner and Solomon, Grove 2003) it is fundamental to say that the term “Zionism” presently carries ideological connotations that are problematic and warrant definition. In the first place, talking about Zionism monolithically and not Zionisms (the Zionism of Zeev Jabotinsky is certainly very different from Martin Buber’s), is to fall into essentialisms that are epistemologically flawed. The need for historization and particularization of different ideological and regionalistic proposals for national

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Jewish self-determination is imperative to develop a theoretical framework that could allow for any productive analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The problem gets exacerbated by the fact that since the UN resolution in the seventies which branded Zionism as racism (1975 revoked in 1991), the term is extremely semantically charged with ultra-nationalism, militaristic expansion, oppression, colonialism, and other appended connotations that are exchanged haphazardly. Following Butler's own argumentation that collapsing anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism confounds the terms and renders them ultimately meaningless, her own failure to distinguish ultranationalist tendencies from democratic humanistic tendencies within Zionism, –such as Buber's, whom many intellectual fail to realize was a committed Zionist that lived (and died) first in Palestine and then in Israel–, is an exercise on obfuscation and misrepresentation that ultimately void the meaning of the term and render it useless. That is why I shall be defining how the term Zionism will be utilized in this article, that is, its original connotation: Jewish self-determination in Israel.

Butler's essay starts by critiquing Lawrence Summers, president of Harvard, for his speech condemning divestment campaigns against Israel and labeling them "actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not in their intent" (249). Butler claims that by branding political actions and criticism against Israel's policies anti-Semitic, Summers intends to control discourse of those dissenting academic voices who venture into the public sphere. Butler is correct in defending academic freedom, activism and the right, moreover, the obligation of political participation of every academic, a tradition in my native Mexico since the 19th century. Butler is engaging in sophism when claiming that Summers is establishing a model for reception and interpretation of criticism of Israeli policies as anti-Semitic from his position of symbolic power (as President of Harvard), when she herself models historical interpretation and political positioning for left-wing intellectuals due to her academic prestige as a cult figure for progressive scholars. What is more, as she expresses in a *Ha'aretz* interview (January 7, 2004) her books have been translated into fourteen languages, and one can solidly affirm that the name Judith Butler carries much more cultural capital and international recognition than Summers does, who is known due to his institutional positions and among economists predominantly. As one of the most recognized theorists of our times, Butler consciously and willfully models the versions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that are likely to be adopted as the interpretative canon for intellectuals in the left in the United States. In fact, she expounds a dictum for "Jewish American progressives" in academia:

"The progressive Jewish stance...will refuse as anti-Semitic the critical impulse or to accept anti-Semitic discourse as a legitimate substitute for critique (265)."

As cultural critic, she undoubtedly acknowledges that her position and actions voice only one of the many possible progressive historical interpretations and responses to the conflict.

Butler does indeed identify a variety of alternative postures for the polity: "a revised version of Zionism, a post-Zionist Israel, a self-determining Palestine or an amalgamation of Israel into a greater Israel/Palestine where all race- and religiously based qualifications on rights and entitlements

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would be eliminated...(263)." Ignoring the crucial points that there is no racial qualification and that group nationalism has characterize Israeli socio-legal formations vastly more than religion, this universalistic position, albeit derived from lofty philosophical origins, ignores particularistic rights and is not politically feasible. Yet, it is proposed and embraced by highly privileged Western intellectuals, activists, and theorists (Palestinian and Israeli intellectuals who endorse this position are informed upon these traditions). That relinquishing self-determination is neither desirable for the vast majority of Israeli Jews and Arabs, nor for Palestinians who are in dire need to fulfill their national aspirations. Are Americans and Europeans to tell Levantines —noting that despite being considered a Western state, Israel's population is overwhelmingly non-Western — how to define and construe their identity, or how to establish their country even before its inception — in the case of Palestinians — in the best Orientalist of fashions?

The way that Western intellectuals tend to patronize the Palestinian position, depicting them as victims with no political choices or responsibilities whatsoever manifests of Western condescension, an Orientalist attitude that views Palestinians in particular and Arabs in general as subjects with no autonomy, as children in a moral sense. After Libya's Prince Sneh's approach to the Palestinian Authority (January 7, 2004), parroting European and American proposals of a one-state solution, this entity clearly expressed its preference for self-determination if they were given the right to an autonomous state in the West Bank and Gaza. To create a Habermasian paradise (where every citizen could participate in public political debate and the policy decision-making of their country) is impossible in Israel/Palestine, but if it were possible, it would amount to the implementation of Thomas More's *Utopia* in New Spain by Franciscans and Dominicans. It is finally a Western experiment, and a dangerous one, if we are to remember Kosovo, an import that robs both Palestinians and Jews of their right to sovereignty.

In her essay, Butler differentiates between "anti-Semitic speech, that say, produces a hostile and threatening environment for Jewish students which any university administrator would be obligated to oppose and to regulate, with a speech that makes a student politically uncomfortable because it opposes a state or a set of policies that any student may defend" (253). While I support unconditional academic freedom, one ought to ask Butler where she proposes the limits of these speech and actions be drawn. Would the intellectual harassment that Jewish students who publicly take a pro-Israel stance — from both right and left-wing professors (the abuse of this position of power is by definition unethical) qualify under the guidelines Butler proposes? Our role as educators is first and foremost to develop a critical consciousness amongst our students, to provide them with critical tools and information; however, to sentence them to silence is absolutely unacceptable. Even when no educator will acknowledge the practice of academic repression, we have to recognize the existence of many inevitable silences that hound our students. Some silences stem from inability to formulate alternative responses to theoretically sophisticated professors. Or they might echo the fear of academic reprisal and the marginalization from

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graduate and dissertation committees, especially by highly recognized intellectuals. There are yet some silences that dare not defy their discursive environment. The interaction of silences is a very complex one.

And among peers in the academic environment, if one is called a "Zionist cunt" by a colleague, would that qualify as anti-Semitism? This is precisely what happened just a year ago to a Jewish professor who studies domestic violence in both the Jewish and Arab sectors in Israel. Or would an aggressive email with a false name sent to a Hebrew professor opening with the phrase "Why don't all Jews move to Israel?" (and leave the world alone, purified of the Judaic germ) qualify? It's intellectually invalid to ostracize intellectuals dissenting from what they perceive as a reductionist and biased position towards Israel that publicly marginalizes students and professors who dis-identify with anti-Zionism and yet view themselves, (and have been viewed by others) as progressives often participating in radical forums surrounding ethnicity, gender, sexuality, colonialism. Is this not normativity?. Who and what determine the limits of anti-Semitic discourse?

For the silence and symbolic violence imposed on many of us within a space (in theory) supportive of critical enquiry that the academic left claims to endorse and promote, is tantamount to censorship, mirroring precisely the policing Butler claims when her political actions are alluded to as anti-Semitic by Summers. Butler expounds that the charge of anti-Semitism is the worst one that could be made to any Jew, a devastating moral charge for a Jewish academic like herself, one that would amount to an affront to academic freedom. But doesn't left-wing exclusion and aggression to those who favor the existence of Israel in academic forums, even while critiquing some of its policies, equally control discourse and dissidence?

If Butler is upset at the charge of anti-Semitism by Summers, the all-too acceptable comparison of Israeli policy with Nazism would even more dramatically reverberate in the Jewish imagination as the worst epithet you could call a state founded at great length by survivors of the Holocaust. Those of us that lost our genealogy in the annihilation of European Jewry (then the impoverished masses—along with gypsies, left-wing political dissidents, and homosexuals) find this hyperbolic comparison aberrant given the significant differences not only between the concrete plan to systematically exterminate these groups by Nazi policy, but by the industry of death stemming from the camps (soaps, pillows, coats) which by far does not correspond to the yet tragic Palestinian reality. As Ellen Willis points out: "I imagine that most perpetrators of this position concede that Israel is not a totalitarian dictatorship with a program of world domination, nor has engaged in the systematic murder of millions of people on the grounds that they are a subhuman race."

We also find intellectuals like Chomsky, with his infamous defense of Faurisson, who feel that Holocaust revisionism and denial in vogue these days, is not anti-Semitic but rather a form of universalistic liberalism that opposes particularistic privileging of one mass murder.

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Holocaust History

I reiterate my former question: who and what establish the limits of anti-Semitic speech and action?

Political dissent and critique are fundamental to the expression of democracy, and to the inscription of social advancement in its ever-evolving discourse. Of course we must understand democracy as a process, not a *fait accompli*, an ever-enduring process whose goals ought to be to become more inclusive of every one of its citizens, to provide more access to all. To stop political debate and criticism is tantamount to annihilating the process, to condemn it to stasis and therefore to autocracy. Dissidence is indeed a value that for many of us reflects a Jewish ethos. I find that it is not dissidence, criticism of Israel's policies, what might be perceived by some as anti-Semitic, as Butler claims in her essay, but the egregious double standards to which this country is subjected.

A recent opinion poll taken by the European Union showed that the majority of Europeans consider Israel as the country that most endangers peace and security worldwide. To brand Zionism as expansionism, racism, and torture (using and interchanging these tropes freely), in contrast to the validation of ultra-nationalistic Palestinian and pan-Arabic movements with dismal human rights records, is indeed biased. To willfully ignore that Israel is the only pluralistic democracy in the Middle East, where racist practices against Arabs in Israel, Jews and non-Jews, have been and are openly identified, acknowledged, and critiqued, and due to this process there has been undeniable democratic progress, is unfair. To identify the flaws in any democracy such as discrimination against the Turks in Germany and France today, or dissatisfaction with flaws of contemporary American democracy, never becomes grounds for demanding that these countries be dismantled. In the case of Israel where issues of human rights and democratic process are openly critiqued, the one and only country in the Middle East to incorporate dissidence into its public discourse, a very different standard is applied. The racist anti-democratic misogynistic practices, often embedded in law in the countries surrounding Israel, are of little interest to the defenders of human rights who demand that the only functioning democracy in the Middle East be dismantled. Despite discrimination (exclusionary racism that exists in the United States, in Latin America, in Arab countries, in anti-Arabic and anti-Semitic Europe), Israeli Arabs are citizens who do participate in public discourse, vote, and run for office. In fact, Ahmed Tibi at one time was Arafat's adviser and a member of the Knesset simultaneously.

And in order to label Israel a colonial state, one would need to label any post-colonial state with issues of refugees — almost every post-colonial state — colonial. In fact one could add parenthetically that nobody is claiming that Libya, Pakistan, Nigeria, Algiers, Congo (where hundreds of people are dying daily), or Jordan disappear despite the fact that in terms of human rights and democracy, there is much more to be desired than Israel's record, notwithstanding Israel's own failings in that regard.

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As Arieh Saposnik, a cultural historian at my university acutely points out:

Although some surface aspects of Zionism share conspicuous aspects of colonialism, such as European settlers establishing themselves in the Middle East, there are several important distinctions: the most assailant circumstances in which those settlers arrived, (as refugees), and the purposes of their settlement (not to draw from the raw materials of the country for the sake of a colonial mother potency — there was no mother potency). In their case their countries of origin had often exercised violent discrimination against them. Furthermore, if some of the models of the study of colonialism might be useful to comprehend some aspects of Zionist history, it is at least equally true, possibly more so, that it is post-colonial theory that provides more useful tools for the understanding of a national liberation movement which sought to reclaim the identity of the principal impoverished other in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe.

To this, one could add that the character of *dhimmis* in Muslim countries that Jews had to live with for more than twelve centuries, did not exactly warrant the Mizrahi population an equal opportunity status, their expulsion from most of their places of origin after the creation of Israel, and their character of refugees — like that of Holocaust survivors — does not fit the colonial immigration model. This combined migratory population constituted more than 68 percent of Israel's population at its inception in 1948.

Double standards amount to factual distortions, misrepresentations, de-contextualization of facts, and selective omissions, to a refusal of acknowledging an historical framework that informs current tragedies, both Palestinian and Israeli. If one is to denounce the demolition of homes in Ramallah, it is also imperative to denounce suicide bombings in Haifa and Netanya. Why is the killing of Palestinian "children and civilians" (as if the Israeli military purposefully attacked Kinder-gartens) regularly alluded to by "progressives", while the killings of teenagers in a disco, of a family celebrating Passover, of mothers with their babies buying groceries in a shuk, of Israeli Arabs in Haifa, dismissed, let alone dramatized or empathized with? They are all lumped together as "suicide bombings" — a euphemism for homicide — mentioned (sometimes), to presume a sense of ideological fairness, and then immediately discounted and justified. These rhetorical strategies do as much disservice to the Palestinian cause as "the charge of anti-Semitism" to any criticism of Israeli policies, as Butler states.

The logic is that occupation allows anything. Such a totalizing

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exception mirrors the ugly self-permissions employed by Israel's settler-class who violate the human rights of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The occupation of the West Bank is tragic and devastating both for Palestinians and Israelis. However, we do need to acknowledge that there have been different attempts on Israel's part to end this situation.

What Pilar Rahola calls politely Palestinian nihilism, the constant practice of terrorism (justified by the American and European left as resistance and heroism), is a reality that is ready to pounce at Israeli citizens, both Jewish and Arab, at any moment. The culture of suicide bombings is a necrophilic ritual where life is substituted by a symbolic reality (call it Heaven, or an idealized version of Nation) that impedes the possibility of negotiating concrete policy. Only negotiation can fulfill the tremendous urgency of a sovereign country for the Palestinian people and the welfare of the whole region. Legitimizing one's cause needs to give way to the elimination of detrimental violence that merely hinders any political viability.

It has become common to criticize Israel for "its military power, its differential forms of citizenship, its unmonitored practices of torture, its brutality at the borders, and its egregious nationalism" (257). To render a fair analysis, however, one might also address the brutality inflicted upon Palestinian women, who after being gang-raped, are chopped up and displayed in public piles because Palestinian men accused them of looking lasciviously at Israeli soldiers or consorting with Israelis. Or the new Hamas tactic of forcing "dishonored" Palestinian women to redeem themselves by becoming suicide bombers for fear of the reaction of their families to their out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Or the receipt of incentives of \$25,000 for families of "martyrs". Or the fact that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* — one of the most anti-Semitic texts in existence — and *Mein Kampf* — are best-sellers in the Arab world. Or that each Palestinian receives four cents a day from international support while their Palestinian leader sends \$100,000 to his wife in Paris. Or that Palestinian education — education reform in support of peace was one of the main conditions at Oslo—is poisoning the generations to a point where it will be very difficult to coexist with Israelis for decades without outbreaks of violence.

Butler points out an important fact: positioning in the Middle Eastern politics ought not to be either fully pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli, and I fully agree with her. However, in her essay I don't see Butler critiquing any aspect of the forms that the Palestinian national struggle has been taking, let alone the massive corruption and strategic instigation to violence against Israelis and Jews by the Palestinian Authority, and the abuse and exploitation of their own people. Does

trampling the rights of the Palestinian people to a just and democratic rule not concern her as it does me?

The displacement of Palestinians is a tragedy and their plight is never to be minimized. Occupation is inevitably painful. Many Israeli policies throughout its history are severely critiqued by many of us. But isn't that true of any country, especially colonial powers, with Spain, France, and Britain at the forefront? Has anyone historically called for the dismantling of these powers or the US, with its "acquisition" of more than half of Mexico's territory, including Berkeley?

It would be unfair to forget that recently, before the Al Aksa *intifada*, a solid majority of Israelis supported the Oslo Peace Process (a majority still supports the peace process for that matter), that its culmination in Taba (2001) presented an opportunity, however imperfect, for Palestinian statehood with a capital in Jerusalem; and that their leadership failed its people and instead embraced terrorism. Despite Rabin's assassination in 1995 by religio-national Jewish fanatics, there was still a commitment to Palestinian sovereignty, because in Israel, popular opinion overwhelmingly veered towards peace, which meant surrendering occupation.

Butler presents an elaborate ellipsis to what is obvious, that the collapsing of the terms Jew and Zionist — the semantic multiplicity of this latter term makes it impossible to determine what exactly Butler does mean by it — amounts to breeding anti-Semitism. If one interprets Zionism as the right for Jewish self-determination, then we cannot deny that while not being one and the same, both terms are inevitably referenced by each other. In fact Butler herself expresses the contradiction of her thesis: "*The heartache emerges from the thought that Israel*, by subjecting 3.5 million Palestinians to a military occupation, *represents the Jews...*"(257) [emphasis RS-V].

Bundists, like my grandparents, were totally committed to socialist internationalism, and were therefore, anti-Zionists believing that socialism would resolve the "Jewish question". That is, until Stalinism and the Holocaust. These two dramatically determining traumas that informed the foundation of the State of Israel —combined with the growth and the prominence of the American Jewish community which Butler acknowledges and critiques—, should lead her also to acknowledge that the intertwining of the terms Judaism and Zionism has allowed the use of anti-Zionism to become a ruse for anti-Semitism.

The relocation of millions of Jewish-European refugees to Israel after the concentration camps informed the

founding of Israel, the only country that would accept them. And the expulsion of Mizrahim from Arab countries, some of them having resided there since the Babylonian exile, with negligible capital informed Israeli identity almost as profoundly. If collective identities are derived from collective histories, it is undeniable that most every Jew, as one might live one's own form of Judaism, either secularly, politically, religiously, ethically, or a conflation of some or all of these, somehow is referenced by Israel, either sharing its religious symbolism, its foundational history, by identifying or dis-identifying oneself with the creation of the State, or with its policies, or its destiny. The Israeli state and Judaism are not the same, but they are always referenced by each other.

If that were not the case, why would Butler write such an impassioned and heartfelt essay distancing herself from Israel's current policies and contesting the tenets upon which it was founded if she did not identify (or disidentify) or somehow associate (or disassociate) herself with it as a Jew? She herself affirms her investment in the State, out of her "Jewishness". Distance, one agrees with her, is imperative in any form of critique, but is it possible, as she proposes, "to widen the rift between the State of Israel and the Jewish people...?" Because as Butler expounds in her own gender theories, identity is porous, one cannot neatly compartmentalize identities that sometimes compete, sometimes coalesce, identities which engage other identities, as intersections of Zionism, Israel, Jews, and Judaism do.

If we had a scalpel that could efficiently separate Jews from Jewish sovereignty, could we deny our common history despite our cultural differences and political positions? We can criticize Israel's current policy of occupation, but can we relinquish being referenced by Israel as Jews, as Butler claims is possible? For if identification came merely from "...food...religious ritual...social service organizations...diasporic communities...civil rights and social struggles that may exist in relative independence from the question of the status of Israel" (257) what would Ethiopian and Russian Jews have in common when social rituals in all the categories she offers are so different in their countries of origin? What Butler voices is a call to isolationist cultural identities within the global Jewish community, one that denies Jewish trans-culturalism out of anger over Israel's occupation policies. In Butler's vision, Israel would become the new displaced subject of Jewish life.

As an American Jew, Butler's experience of the

Diaspora has evidently been a privileged one, as that of many American Jews. Perhaps because I am an immigrant to the United States, I am still baffled at the arrogance of the interpretative (im)position of some ideologues of American Jewish left-wing academe(s) which selectively ignore facts evident to many street-level Jews: that since the Al-Aksa *intifada* there has been a 40 percent upsurge of anti-Semitic acts in Britain, that violence against Jews throughout the world has dramatically intensified. How would she separate “Zionism” from “Jewishness” when both terms are collapsed into one, not by theorists like herself, but by synagogue bombings in Istanbul and in France.

Throughout her critical corpus, Butler expounds that identity is mediated by discourse, that polyglossia defines this discourse; she undoubtedly acknowledges that we cannot construct meanings from one day to the other transforming discursive spaces and their field(s) of reception. In the case of understanding and theorizing the Middle-Eastern reality (-ies), this theoretical notion is crucial in proposing political models that are congruent. Some of the positions expounded on by Butler — such as the radical distancing of Jews from Israel — fail miserably at grasping the realities of discourse.

Her stance would be admirable were it not for the reality of Judeophobia. However much she theorizes Laclau, Judeophobia is a historical disease that reverberates in Western and Islamic discourse, and tragically, despite her attempts at distancing herself from Israel, she will be associated with its plights and its destiny. In fact, she might even make it to www.jewwatch.com, like Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and *Bad Subjects* editor Joel Schalit.

Bartov offers an interesting theory with respect to this position:

That the vocabulary of this rhetoric is taken directly (whether consciously or not) from Nazi texts is so clear that one wonders why is there such a reluctance to recognize it...In part this is owed to the fact that those who would most readily identify the provenance of these words and ideas are largely liberals, some which happen to be Jewish, and thus are likely to be most harmed both personally and ideologically with this

identification. By exposing the anti-Semitic underbelly of this phenomenon, they would expose themselves as Jews and friends of Jews, and would open themselves to the argument that precisely the opposition of this phenomenon is the best proof of Jewish domination in the world.

I believe that at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are two competing narratives: displacement and struggle, first for recognition, then for statehood, has driven and defined the Palestinian people. Would the foundational myth of a negotiated Palestinian State not be acceptable within the context of jihad and heroic nationalism? The Holocaust, and therefore survival references the creation of Israel: in order to survive, Israel will build walls or sign treaties and return land, as it has historically done. As long as Palestinians cannot surrender struggle in exchange for statehood, or Israel feels the panic of annihilation triggered with every suicide bombing, then the unbearable situation will continue. Acceptance of Israel's existence, it's right to sovereignty, as well of that of a Palestinian state, and the marginalization of fanatical groups from both sides, are the only hope for the region.

Both the left in Europe and the United States have their pet causes. These have nothing to do with numbers or even the severity of a situation. Take Sudan: almost a million people have perished in that country with the absolute silence of American 'progressive academics'. Ten million Quechua-speaking Indians between Perú and Bolivia are isolated and living in precarious conditions, which is only the tip of the iceberg if we review the situation of Colombian, Venezuelan, Central American, and Mexican Indians, to mention just a few groups which have engendered another fatuous silence. And the Tibetan occupation, the millions of Tibetans that are deprived of their land and any attempt to regain their country is brutally repressed, is left by the left, to Richard Gere. The selection of the victim has its own logic and in the case of Israel, one which I do not fully understand beyond Judeophobia. But as Butler says, nobody monopolizes this position.

Pilar Rahola, a committed feminist and left-wing

member of the Spanish Parliament for eight years, has joined a few other distinguished European progressive intellectuals manifesting their moral indignation in a Europe that has embraced anti-Semitism under the guise of anti-Zionism in an attempt to balance — a tragic impossibility — the biases of the European left. The same could be said for the American academic left. I quote at deserved length from Rahola's UNESCO speech (June 21, 2003), "Israel and Flies."

From the left(s) stem the new European anti-Semitism, disguised as anti-Zionism; from the left(s) stem the romantic pan-Arabism which has led to the minimization of terrorism...If we agree the it's the left which configures the prestigious ideas of our society, and that left-wing intellectuals are those who are recognized as defenders of progress, then we will be in agreement that we have a serious problem...New anti-Semites do not recognize themselves as such. Anti-Semitism is a classic expression of the extreme right, and therefore, the left repudiates and denies it. The umbrella of anti-Zionism, however, or directly of anti-Israelism, is much more comfortable to embrace: it protects well from the rain of criticism and it allows a digestible intellectual disguise...

The result is one that we are witnessing—it's most direct manifestation being the painful aggression that Jewish communities are suffering in different countries. From personalized vetoes—which could explain harsh situations in Spain—to physical violence, like the one pacifist Jews suffered in the already famous demonstration in Paris...

Israel is, today, an authentic obsession of the European left and the most relevant example of the fascist tics which the left can present. These are my accusations: Informative manipulation

Criminalization of the legitimacy

of the Israeli state

Minimization of Jewish victims

Banalization of the Shoah

*And indifference — when not
applause — unto the terrorist
harm of integrism...*

*...Orphan of self-epics,
disconcerted with its valise of
broken dreams, the left
embraces the Arab world looking
for the resonances of Lawrence
of Arabia. And it falls in love with
total wars of tribal chants of
revolution, perhaps convinced
that between the “revolution or
death” of el Che, and “hurray for
death” of Hamas, there is not
much difference. They are
looking for Lawrence of Arabia
and, to the misfortune of us all,
they still haven’t found out that,
in truth, they have encountered
Bin Laden.*

*A common territory, more than a
manichean dogmatism... I
accuse the European left, my
left, of being the intellectual
façade of the new anti-Semitism
that exists in Europe nowadays.*

**A LEFT THAT BETRAYS ITSELF
BY BETRAYING DEMOCRACY.**

*[emphasis in original; all
translations by RS-V].*

The contest for discursive spaces within the left that Rahola expounds ought to lead us to reflect upon ideological currency, its acquisition and exploitation within academe. What is the investment of a Jewish intellectual like Butler when aligning herself with “anti-Zionist” activism such as the organization of the divestment campaign at Berkeley out of her own “Jewishness”, as she herself expresses? In this respect my colleague and *Bad Subjects* editor Joe Lockard insightfully expressed the following:

*A point that occurs to me in
thinking about Butler/Israel is
that if one is positioned on the
political left, then scoring points
against Israel — as legitimate*

and necessary as a critique of the occupation and affirmation of Palestinian rights is — represents a form of political and ethical self-capitalization. A specific critique of Israel becomes a crucial element of the necessary intellectual position to sustain this alignment rather than a critique that addresses the region and its heavily conflicted cultures. But one must challenge a political position invested in the specificity of one critique of Israel/Palestine rather than, as one example, gender apartheid in Saudi Arabia. It is this delimitation of focus that betrays the underlying intellectual formation of anti-Semitism, an ideology that has relied historically on identifying the specificities of Jewish offensiveness to a right order.

Stemming from the latter observations, we could logically ask the following questions: does Butler as Jew need to distance herself radically from an entity that is identified by most as Jewish to demonstrate her allegiance to a mainstream left-wing position? Does Butler's "Jewishness" provides her with a strategic within the left given her political positioning with respect to Israel? Does she become a more credible left wing ideologist by adopting an anti-Zionist position acquiring wider and more public visibility and recognition? Does her political stance preserve and moreover mythify her "radical" status? Will the discursive spaces within the left be divided into radical, semi-radical, not-so radical, etc. depending on abnegation of one's own particularism? (That is, merely in the case of Jews, not any other minority). Will we need a radiometer to define where we stand within the academic left, and will its

measurement itself be defined by adopting an anti-Zionist stance? So called radical “anti-Zionism” is theoretically trite and complacent, merely pleading for public acceptance by simplifying the historically intricate underlying realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Simplification, as we know, often falls in the category of propaganda. This, in truth, betrays any radical position. By not deconstructing the nuances and complexities of political realitie(s) where gender(s), ethnicitie(s), nationalism(s), collective historie(s) intersect, one cannot say that the glance of modernity is ever transcended or even problematized.

A large part of the academic left aids and abets, promotes and develops Judeophobic discourse. Both in the spirit of dissidence and reflection that any pluralistic society owes itself, especially from left-wing intellectuals, it is imperative that progressive academics who deplore racism or gender discrimination, no matter whether in Havana or in Guantanamo, voice our dissenting opinions and fight for our discursive spaces within the left and from the left, our sequestered left, by repudiating Judeophobia, the only locus where the left and the right consistently coincide.

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